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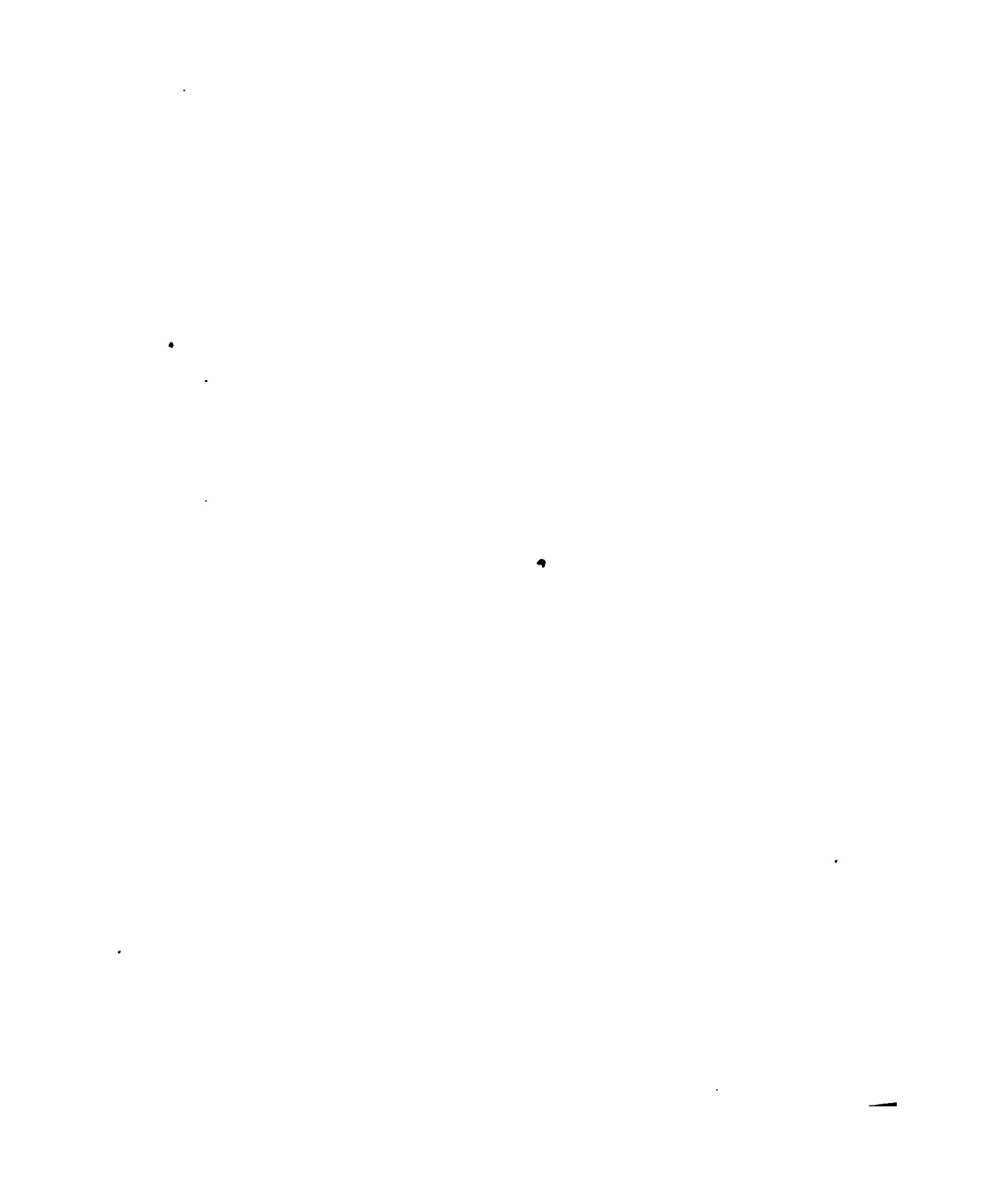
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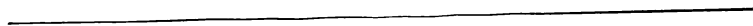
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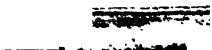
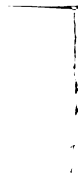
Is it Shakespeare's Confession ?

THE CRYPTOGRAM IN HIS EPITAPH.

BY

HERBERT JANVRIN BROWNE.





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HERBERT JANVRIN BBROWNE.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE Shakespeare-Bacon controversy has dragged along for several decades. The Baconians have carried but a few unimportant outworks of the Shakespearian intrenchments. They have burned unlimited powder of possibility and probability, with never a solid shot of fact. Blame them not. They had none.

But Mr. Ignatius Donnelly comes to the attack with vigor, ingenuity, and directness that promise results. From glimpses of his forthcoming book it is evident he has gathered a huge mass of collateral, contemporaneous evidence of great merit, and that he will make a special pleading, brilliant, exhaustive, and forceful. Still more important, he claims to have discovered and unfolded a cipher inserted in the text of the Shakespearian Plays by Lord Bacon, who therein not only lays claim to their authorship but gives at length the unwritten history of the Court of Elizabeth. In this phase of the controversy there can be no middle ground. The proofs to be offered by Mr. Donnelly must be absolute,

indisputable and final, or the Baconian theory, unsupported by other conclusive evidence, falls to the ground, with the just verdict, "Not proven."

There was one important point which had borne heavily against the Baconians. There had never been brought to light any proof that question as to the authorship of the Plays existed during the life of Shakespeare or his surviving contemporaries. Mr. Donnelly promises to prove, by intrinsic and hidden evidence in the Plays, that Bacon made such claim shortly after Shakespeare's death.

It is the purpose of this pamphlet to show that some close acquaintance or relative of Shakespeare gave such acknowledgement, or that *Shakespeare himself made the confession*;—to show that, in the Epitaph, written or selected by himself, he concealed a cipher stating that Francis Bacon wrote the Plays, or else some kinsman or intimate friend of Shakespeare inserted the cryptogram.

As to the honesty and value of my work let the critics judge. They may, undoubtedly will, see flaws which have escaped my eye. I am strongly inclined to the belief that there is more in the Epitaph than I have stated. I hope other Shakespearian students will follow the thread. If this pamphlet be received in the spirit it is offered I shall feel that not in vain has the midnight oil been burned while wrestling with the Sphinx-like enigma of the doggerel distich, pregnant, since the New World was young, with the weightiest confession of Christendom.



SHAKESPEARE'S BIRTH AND DEATH.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE died at Stratford-on-Avon, April 23, 1616, Old Style, or May 3, New Style, and two days later was buried in Stratford Church. His fatal illness was a fever induced by a protracted drinking bout in the boon companionship of Ben Jonson and other worthies.

There is no exact knowledge of the date of Shakespeare's birth. Says Ingleby: "It is discomfoting to the punctual keeper of birthdays to find that the tradition of Shakespeare's birth on the 23d of April, 1564, O. S., cannot be traced to any authentic source."

The Register of Baptisms at Stratford Church contains this entry :

1564
April
26 Gulielmus filius Johannes Shakspere.

And the Register of Burials this :

1616
April
25 Will Shakspere, Gent.

On the tablet under Shakespeare's bust, in the lower right-hand corner, is inscribed :

OBIIT ANO DO^I 1616
ÆTATIS, 53. DIE 23 AP.

From which it appears that Shakespeare was *baptized* April 26, 1564, and died in the 53d year (*ætatis*) of his age.

Attention should be called to the statement of the late Prof. De Morgan, made in 1850, that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries "the anniversary of birth used to be celebrated as the first day of a new year." The tradition is that Shakespeare died on his birthday; but, on strength of Prof. De Morgan's statement, he may have been born April 24, 1564, and arrived in his 53d year on the day of his death, April 23d, 1616, as now a young man is of age the day before his 21st birthday. This is of importance.

THE EPITAPH.

Shortly after his burial a stone slab some four feet in length was placed above the grave. On this stone was rudely carved in sunken letters an Epitaph. This Epitaph has been credited to Shakespeare, but no positive evidence has been offered that it was his work. Southwell's letter, written in 1693, and brought to light in 1838, ascribes it to Shakespeare on the strength of local tradition.

The first "Life of Shakespeare" is Rowe's, 1709. Mention had been made in Dugdale's "Antiquities of Warwickshire," Fuller's "Worthies" and Phillips' "Theatrum Poe-

tarum," but only incidentally. Rowe derived his information largely from Thomas Betterton, Player, who was an ardent admirer of Shakespeare, and had made visits of research to Stratford some twenty years after the death, in 1670, of Shakespeare's granddaughter, Elizabeth Nash, afterward Lady Barnard. Betterton seems to have been careful to gather only reliable reminiscences at a period when much that was accurate could be obtained. For Shakespeare's daughters had died, one in 1649 and the other in 1662, and the children of many of his friends were still living. Ingleby calls Betterton's information "rubbish," perhaps because Betterton is authority for the episode of Sir Thomas Lucy's deer, which Ingleby tries to discredit. However, Rowe fails to throw light on the Epitaph.

Some Shakespearian scholars go so far as to deny that he wrote the Inscription, but the denial is due to belief that he would not have been guilty of such unworthy doggerel—for doggerel it is. Yet it would be as difficult to prove he did not write it as to prove he did. It has been suggested that it may have been written by some near friend or relative, or that Shakespeare selected it. Its sentiment might naturally rise from a dread lest his remains might end in the charnel-house, which was described by Ireland in 1795 as "containing the largest collection of human bones he ever saw."

Whether Shakespeare wrote the Epitaph or not, its injunction seems to have sufficed to keep his widow, Anne,

who died August 6, 1623, from being buried by his side, though it was her desire. The nearest approach to an excavation was in the summer of 1796. Some workmen were digging a vault near his grave and had probably slightly encroached on its limits, when the threatened danger was discovered and a watch placed to see that his remains were not disturbed. But as he was buried in the earth and not in a vault, it is doubtful if there was anything but a few handfuls of dust to disturb. Miss Delia Bacon determined to search the grave for proof of the Baconian origin of the Plays, and, with the pertinacity of her sex, bribed the warden and entered the church at night to fulfil her purpose, and then, woman-like, backed out of her undertaking.

If Shakespeare wrote the Plays, it would seem improbable that he wrote the Epitaph ; but in the Ashmolean MSS., Oxford, No. 38, p. 181, is found this anecdote :

Mr. Ben Johnson and Mr William Shakespeare being merrye att a tavern, Mr. Jonson haveing begune this for his epitaph,

Here lies Ben Jonson that was once one ;

he gives yt to Mr. Shakspear to make upp, who presently wrightes,

Who while hee liv'de was a sloe thing
And now being dead is no thinge.

Hardly up to the level of the sonnets, and quite on a par with his own epitaph.

Another epitaph, written in pleasantry or sarcasm, on a living subject, one John Combe, an old usurer, with whom Shakespeare was intimate, runs as follows :

Ten in the hundred lies here ingrav'd.
'Tis a hundred to ten his soul is not saved.
If any man ask, Who lies in this tomb?
Oh! oh! quoth the Devil, 'tis my John=a=Combe.

An early MS. in Rawlinson's Collection in the Bodleian Library attributes to Shakespeare this epitaph, first published by Malone in 1790:

When God was pleased, the world unwilling yet,
Elias James to Nature pay'd his debt
And here repositeth. As he lived he dyde,
The saying in him strongly verifide.
Such life, such death; then, the known truth to tell,
He liv'd a goodly life and dyde as well.

Though this epitaph is of doubtful authenticity, it is clear that Shakespeare was capable of doggerel verse, and is, therefore, open to the charge of having written his Epitaph.

Quoting from J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps' "Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare," London, 1883: "The honours of repose which have thus far been conceded to the poet's remains have not been extended to the tombstone. The latter had by the middle of the last century sunk below the level of the floor, and, about fifty years ago, had become so much decayed as to suggest a vandalic order for its removal, and in its stead to place a new slab, one which marks certainly the locality of Shakespeare's grave and continues the record of his farewell lines, but indicates nothing more. The original memorial has wandered from its allotted station; no one can tell whither."

There are numerous examples of what purport to be copies of this Epitaph, seldom two alike. Steevens gives it in the following form, though the authority for his eccentric capitalization is not apparent:

GOOD FRENDE FOR JESUS SAKE FORBEARE
TO DIGG T—E DUST ENCLOASED HERE.
BLESE BE T—E MAN ^T_Y SPARES T—ES STONES
AND CURST BE HE ^T_Y MOVES MY BONES.

Dugdale, who is about the earliest authority, does not give it in the same form. In some particulars Steevens' version is certainly inaccurate, even if it purports to be copied from the original stone. Its peculiar capitalization seems to bear no vital relation to the cipher. By a forced count the cryptogram can be made to fit this version, but it fails to render in one particular of great importance.

I am indebted to the courtesy of Prof. Elliott Coues, M. D., of Washington, the eminent ornithologist and naturalist, and well known as the editor of the Biogen Series now being issued by Estes and Lauriat, for an admirable *fac simile* of the Epitaph, a reduced photo-lithographic copy of which is interleaved with this pamphlet. The *fac simile* was taken by Prof. Coues directly from the stone in Stratford Church by lamp-black transfer. He states that the slab seems to be of sandstone, and that the lettering is of the rudest character, as can be seen in the reproduction. It is in undoubted imitation of the lettering on the original stone, which was removed, and the literal text beyond question is exact. It will

be noticed that certain letters are joined in ways that defy typographical reproduction. This joining of letters will be shown to have a reason in the cipher.

THE CRYPTOGRAM.

It is common belief that cipher-making and solving is child's play. The opinion is often expressed that a cipher can be discovered in any literary matter, prose or verse. Nothing is more fallacious. Let any intelligent person try to insert a sentence of forty letters in a verse not over three times as long, by arithmetical succession, and he will soon discover the nature of his task. Or let him seek to extract by legitimate sequences from such a verse a coherent sentiment not purposely placed therein, and he will not be long in arriving at the end of his tether. I do not refer to ciphers involved in a meaningless jumble of letters, but to the highest class of cryptograms in which the enigma is concealed; letter by letter, within definite and logical sentences in true arithmetical sequences, with or without the aid of an esoteric alphabet. Such cryptograms of any length are among the rarest of literary curiosities.

Let the reader put himself in the place of the cryptographer. He has a given sentence to secrete, a letter at a time, in other sentences, whose continuity and orthography are to be held intact. The cipher sentence must be inserted in such manner that the possessor of the key can unravel the thread and find the hidden meaning. The first difficulty encountered may be that the sequence fails to work. Relief

is sought in employing a substitute alphabet with the original text. In time this, too, fails, and the sequence number is changed again and again. When this no longer gives progress the count may be forced by changing the spelling and other means. Such were the difficulties encountered by the cryptographer of the Epitaph, and similar were the methods of relief. In working the solution I have constantly "struck his trail," leading into blind alleys of half-formed words, from which he retraced his steps and sought new outlets. There are certain logical methods which may be used in seeking solutions. But the great lever for prying out ciphers is the principle of rejection, by which unsound and impossible combinations are discovered and thrown aside. It is useless to weary the reader with the story of trial and retrial by which the clew to the secret of the Epitaph was found. It was not until the whole inclosure was extracted that the method of progress became clear and certain.

The Epitaph is a most remarkable cryptogram. The patience and ingenuity of its author are admirable. To appreciate its beauties the reader is taken into the confidence of a full revelation. The Epitaph contains the sentence, FRANCIS BACON WROTE SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS, and the name SHAXPEARE. How much more there is I am not prepared to say. The first query is, Why SHAXPEARE? There are only five of his autographs in existence, not enough to determine any fixed orthography, in face of the fact that in Shakespeare's day no name was written uni-

formly the same. Halliwell gives over fifty different renderings of Shakespeare's name, nineteen in which "x" is used.

Turn to the Epitaph further on, and compare it with the *fac simile*. The peculiar double letters of the *fac simile* will be found in parentheses in the letter-press. It has been a matter of doubt whether the final character in the first word of the third line in the *fac simile* was a combination TE or whether the line which runs into the S was caused by a slip of the stone-cutter's chisel. I am of the opinion that it is a double letter, and so render it. It will be seen that two alphabets are used in the solution. Under A is placed O, the fifteenth letter, and the new alphabet thus initiated. It seems as if the reason for this is found in the word BACON. The equivalent for N is B, for A is O, and in the cryptogram the word returns upon itself.

Interlining with the new alphabet, each letter of the Epitaph has its equivalent beneath. Counting the double letters as one, there are 109 characters in the Epitaph; counting them singly, 113. The rules of procedure are simple. In running the sequences of the solution the double characters are to be counted as one or two as the exigencies of the count may demand. This is legitimate and necessary. Generally they count as one, in only six instances as two. Letters which have been used are not to be counted except in going to the succeeding letter or counting between words; but they may be employed as cryptographic letters any number of times. If a letter in the New Alphabet is employed

the corresponding letter in the Epitaph must not be counted. The last two rules do not hold in case the letter taken is one of the combination letters, which happens twice. The count within a word is always straight ahead to the end of the line. The next line to take may be above or below ; in five instances lines are jumped. The sequence number holds good through the word with which it starts, but changes with each word.

Let us proceed. The involved sentence contains 34 letters ; the signature 9. The 53d letter in the Epitaph is R ; its equivalent F. F is the 34th letter from the end of the cipher sentence. Count ahead 34 letters, commencing with F, and R is found. Continuing the count in accordance with the rules, using the sequence number 34, and FRANCIS is made out. Note the perpendicular columns of letters and figures. The first column indicates in which alphabet the letters are found, N for new and O for old. The second column shows the six sequence numbers, 34, 27, 31, 26, 30, and 18. Next comes the cryptographic sentence and signature ; next the number of each letter from the beginning of the Epitaph. The use of the remaining columns shows for itself. The notes to the right will aid the count. FRANCIS has been found. The count was exact.

Count back ten letters from F 53, and N is reached. Its equivalent is B. B is the 27th letter from the end of the involved sentence and gives the new sequence number ; use it and BACON comes out. Could anything be more accurate?

Count back ten letters from B 43 and I is discovered with

its equivalent, W. Adding the signature, W is the 31st letter from the end of the cryptogram. Again the sequence number, and, remembering always not to count the letters which have been used in old or new alphabets, the third word is evolved.

The interverbal sequence number now changes. The 18th letter in the sentence is S. The 18th word in the Epitaph is Spares; first letter S 69. Its true number, however, counting all letters, is 72. We are on the fourth word, and 72 is the fourth multiple of 18. Seventy-two is also a multiple of 12, the number of letters in the word to be sought. Again adding the signature, S is the 26th letter and 26 the sequence. SHAKESPEARE's works out as fairly as the rest.

P is the next letter to be sought, 14th from the end and 30th from the beginning of the cryptogram. The 14th word in the Epitaph is BE; the equivalent of B is P. B is the second letter in the alphabet, and P in the cryptogram is the 30th letter; twice 30 is 60, the letter we are on. The sequence number is 30.

SHAXPEARE, the last word and signature, is apparently independent of the preceding sentence in its sequence. It has nine letters; twice 9 is 18. The 108th letter in the Epitaph is S; 108 is the sixth multiple of 18, and SHAXPEARE is the sixth word in the cryptogram. Using 18 as the sequence number the end of the cryptogram is reached. Attention should be called to what seems the only mistake of the cryptographer, though further analysis may show it to be mine. In the sequence from E to A in SHAXPEARE a used

letter is counted. It will be observed in the key epitaph, which shows the numbered letters of the cipher, that Y 96 and H the equivalent of T 97 are both used. It would be within reason to imagine that, confused over the intricacies of the most difficult word of the cipher, the cryptographer may have become careless and thought that H was the equivalent of Y and so counted T 97. The cipher is completed :

KEY TO THE CRYPTOGRAM.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z A B C D E F G H I J K L M N

4 9 12 17 21 29
GOOD FREN D FOR JESUS SAKE FORBEARE
UCCR TFSBR TCF XSGIG GOYS TCFPSOFS

31 35 37 41 50 54
TO DIGG (TH)E DUST ENCLOSED (HE)ARE
HC RWUU (HV)S RIGH SBQZCOGSR (VS)OFS

59 61 63 66 68 74 77 83
BLES(TE) BE ^EY MAN ^TY SPARES (TH)ES STONES
Pzsg(HS) PS ^SM AOB ^HM GDOFSG (HV)SG GHCBSG

86 91 93 95 97 102 104 109
AND CURST BE HE ^TY MOVES MY BONES
OBR QIFGH PS VS ^HM ACJSG AM PCBSG

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29
F R A N C I S B A C O N W R O T E S H A K E S P E A R E S
34 33 32 31 30 29 28 27 26 25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6

30 31 32 33 34 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
P L A Y S S H A X P E A R E .
5 4 3 2 1 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

N	F	53	34	1	
N 34	R	86	33	2	
N 34	A	64	32	3	
O 34	N	43	31	4	
N 34	C	23	30	5	Jump 3d line.
N 34	I	88	29	6	Jump 3d line; count (TH)E as 3.
O 34	S	40	28	7	

N	B	43	27	8	
O 27	A	71	26	9	
N 27	C	99	25	10	
N 27	O	71	24	11	Count (TH)E as 3.
O 27	N	43	23	12	

N	W	33	22	13	31	
O 31	R	12	21	14	30	
O 31	O	46	20	15	29	
O 31	T	79	19	16	28	Count through 4th line.
O 31	E	57	18	17	27	

O	S	69	17	18	26	Count (TH)ES as 4.
N 26	H	97	16	19	25	Jump 3d line.
O 26	A	47	15	20	24	
O 26	K	20	14	21	23	Count into (HE) of (HE)ARE.
O 26	E	51	13	22	22	
N 26	S	82	12	23	21	Count through 2d line.
N 26	P	60	11	24	20	
O 26	E	37	10	25	19	
O 26	A	71	9	26	18	
N 26	R	50	8	27	17	
O 26	E	26	7	28	16	
N 26	S	61	6	29	15	

N	P	60	5	30	14	
O 30	L	45	4	31	13	
O 30	A	27	3	32	12	Jump 3d line.
O 30	Y	96	2	33	11	
O 30	S	78	1	34	10	

N	S	108	9	Count into (TH) of (TH)ES.
O 18	H	75	8	
O 18	A	47	7	
N 18	X	13	6	Jump 2d line.
N 18	P	60	5	Count (TH)ES as 4.
O 18	E	82	4	Long count.
N 18	A	103	3	
O 18	R	72	2	Count (TH)ES as 4 and (TH)E as 3.
O 18	E	37	1	

14 21 28 32
 GOOD FREN D FOR JESUS SAKE FORBEARE
 X C
 38 5
 43 12 37
 25 7 4 31 15 20 22
 TO DIGG (TH)E DUST ENCLOASED (HE)ARE
 W B R F
 13 8 27 1
 17 26
 18 9 42 36 34 16 40
 BLES(TE) BE E MAN T SPARES (TH)ES STONES
 PS A O S
 24 29 3 11 23
 (30 39)
 AND CURST BE HE T
 R I H 19 C A S
 2 6 10 41 36

Did Shakespeare insert the cryptogram himself? Let us look further. It has been pointed out that the exact date of his birth is unknown. It has been shown that he might have been born April 24th, 1564, and still be considered in his 53d year on the day of his death, April 23d, 1616. There are 113 letters in the Epitaph on a full count. Shakespeare died on the 114th day of the year. Both 1564 and

1616 were leap years. Another letter would have brought the number in the Epitaph to 114. The letter I is omitted in FREN^D. The archaic form $\frac{u}{v}$ is used in the third line, while (TH)E is found in the second. Here are *two* missing letters, without counting the omitted E in (TH)ES. If Shakespeare was born on the 24th of April, it was the 115th day of the year. It looks strongly as though the cryptographer had endeavored to have either 114 or 115 letters in the Epitaph, but had been forced to abandon his design by the necessities of the count. The initial letter of the cipher is F 53. It is not probable that Shakespeare knew he would die in his 53d year, unless endowed with second sight; nor that he constructed this intricate cipher during his last illness, but he may have designed it with the intention of having it inscribed on stone under his own supervision in the year of his death. In fact the stone must have been inscribed under the eye of some one familiar with the cipher, or by an engraver working under the strictest instructions, otherwise the abnormal lettering could not have been obtained. The date of the original stone is worthy the closest investigation.

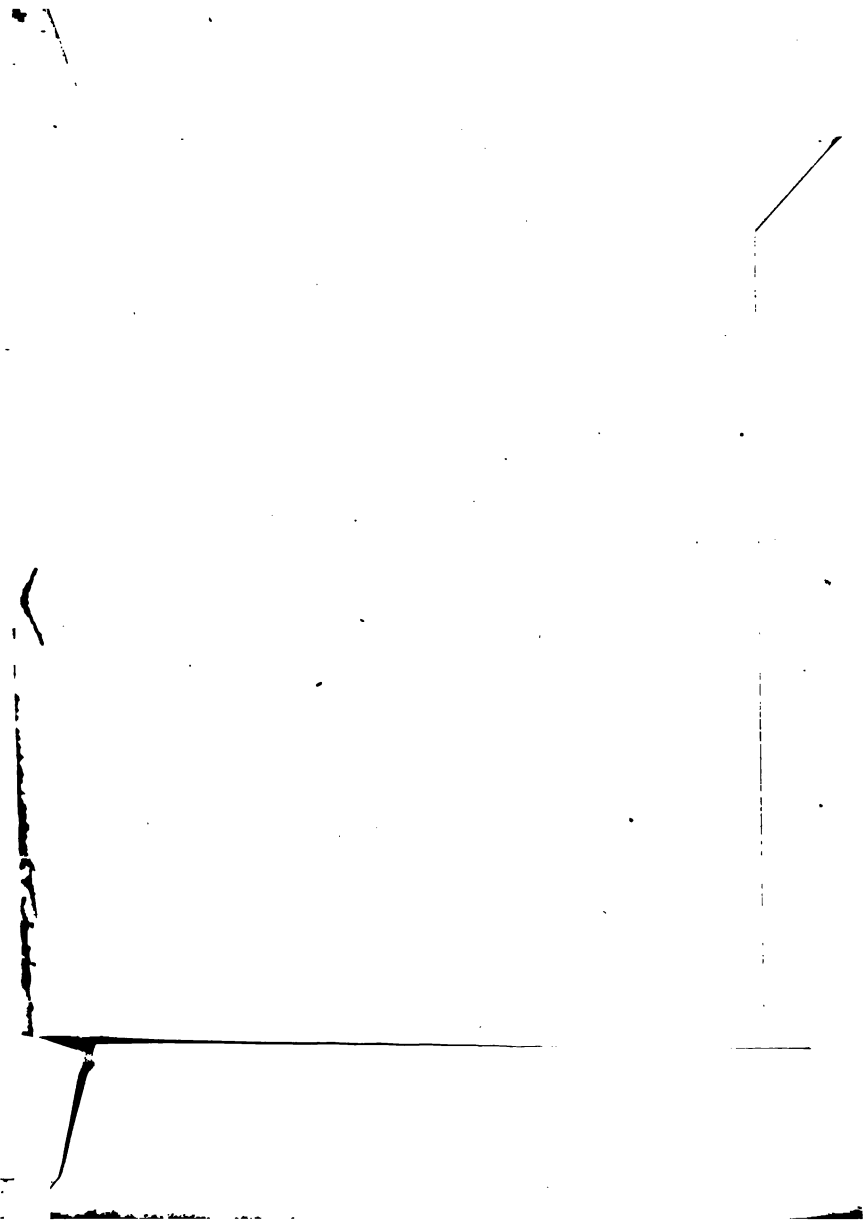
The date of Shakespeare's birth being assigned by tradition to April 23d, it is reasonable to suppose, if that date is incorrect, that the true one was known only to Shakespeare or the members of his family. But there is a tendency, and always has been, if a person dies within a day or two of his birthday, to exercise a sort of mortuary license and make the dates conform, the distant one of birth being the sufferer.

This feat is especially common among the unlettered and ignorant, and such were the members of Shakespeare's family. Bearing this in mind, let us go on. F 53 is the 24th letter in the second line. Does this indicate a date? There are four characters in (HE)ARE. Does it mean April, the fourth month? F 53 might be counted as the 26th letter by separating the doubles, and thus indicate the baptismal day, but there are several reasons that militate against it. Now examine the last three letters in (HE)ARE. In the double alphabet above the Epitaph A is 1, E 5, F 6, R, as the equivalent of D, 4. Place the numbers together in the order indicated, and we get 1564, the year of Shakespeare's birth; and the whole date will read

APRIL 24TH, 1564.

I firmly believe that F 53 is not only the key letter of the cipher, but that it also indicates the hitherto unknown date of Shakespeare's birth.

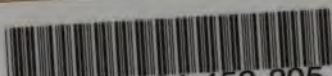
Here the reader and I must part. Let each form in fairness his own conclusions. The question is asked, Is it Shakespeare's confession? The answer may not be far distant.



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A. J.

62
A. J.

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